Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 31 | Issue 4 Article 11

10-1-2014

Fraenkel, PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGIONS FROM PLATO TO SPINOZA: REASON, RELIGION, AND AUTONOMY

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one's main interest is faith and reason, but a rounded picture of Farrer's importance as a philosophical theologian is distorted if his spirituality is allowed to overshadow his philosophy and theology. As I say, what has impressed enthusiasts for Farrer's work is the way he combined these elements and held them in creative tension.

Certainly Zeno's paradox *solvitur ambulando.* But it is also solved by rational reflection on the difference between continual motion and segmental haltings. Similarly, the paradox of faith *solvitur immolando.* But it is also open to the rational support and clarification by what Rowan Williams called Farrer's "viable and sophisticated natural theology," of which Austin Farrer remained a masterful exponent till the end.

Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy, by Carlos Fraenkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 358 pages. $79.00 (hardcover).

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In a bold and exciting new book, Carlos Fraenkel traces a tradition of what he calls "philosophical religion" from its beginnings in ancient Athens through Jewish and Christian Alexandria and through medieval Arabic *falsafa*, arriving finally at the early modern thought of Spinoza, who represents both the culmination of this tradition as well as a challenge to its legitimacy by planting the seeds of biblical criticism. This is no mere historical exercise. Fraenkel presents philosophical religion as a response to the Enlightenment confidence in the rational autonomy of the individual, which he sees as the greatest challenge to maintaining religious culture within the parameters of evolving modern institutions that prize the equality of all persons ahead of religious authority.

Fraenkel explains that the post-Enlightenment consensus which separates philosophy from religion would puzzle historical proponents of philosophical religion, who are called to become God-like through the perfection of reason, as Plato teaches in the *Theaetetus*. Thus philosophy is the highest form of worship, for which it simultaneously provides the foundation. Beginning with the metaphysical concept that God is Reason, historical forms of religion are regarded as exhortations to the practice of philosophy. Homer, Moses, Christ, and Mohammed employ revelation as a tool to set their respective religious communities, composed principally of non-philosophers, on a path to the philosophical life. This way of reading historical religion is an alternative to cultural revolution, which would remake society in the image of an ideal Republic based on pure

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doi: 10.5840/faithphil201431421

philosophy, leaving no room for historical revelation claims. There is an element of *realpolitik* for a philosophical religion that is content with citizens making a discrete contribution to the overall good of society without being fully aware of its greater purpose. Acting as philosophy's handmaid, religion is directed towards the good order of the polis, "a community . . . best described as a *theocracy*, a community ruled by God" (6). Through the rational autonomy *theosis* provides the ruling philosophical elite, the *hoi polloi* share in the political autonomy of their society. And while in principle the imagined stories of the people are superfluous, their use is restored by the philosopher king, a thesis reminiscent of Luc Brisson's important work on how Plato saved the myths.

While Fraenkel provides a wonderfully dynamic survey of philosophical religion in all three of the great Abrahamic faiths, he claims that it is Christians who push the concept furthest by making Christ the *Logos* or Mind (*Nous*) itself. In this way, all people, insofar as they are philosophical, are implicitly Christians. As students of Philo Judaeus, Clement and Origen of Alexandria inherited the problem that their master made central: how to integrate the historical forms of their religion with Platonic philosophy. The *Logos* shows the way. In virtue of his knowledge of the *Logos*, Plato becomes a prophet alongside Moses and Christ. All prophets make the *Logos* central, which the Alexandrian Christians show through an allegorical reading of the Septuagint.

After a fascinating account of *shariah* as a call to the Noetic life in Al-Farabi and Moses Maimonides, and an interlude on the mediation of Averroes to early modern philosophy by way of the Averroist Elijah Delmedigo, Fraenkel arrives at the innovative reception of philosophical religion by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Tainted for posterity by accusations of atheism by certain of his contemporaries, Spinoza is rehabilitated by Fraenkel as a proponent of philosophical religion, which consists for him in a "philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity" (216). Spinoza is ambiguous about the relation between philosophy and religion since he both affirms and denies that the God of the philosophers is the God of the Bible. He ultimately rejects the false alternatives of "dogmatism"—which subordinates Scripture to reason—and "skepticism"—which sets the authority of Scripture over reason—standing firmly in the tradition of philosophical religion by accommodating its pedagogical-political aims, wherein our capacity for self-rule should mirror God's. Fraenkel suggests that Spinoza's method, though proposed for a Christian audience, could equally apply to, say, Islam "[h]ad Spinoza lived in a Muslim country" (275). Ironically, such an approach leaves itself open to the "secularization of the West" and "undermines any attempt to reinterpret a religious or cultural tradition in light of intellectual commitments not derived from the text" (281).

Fraenkel admits there is a shadow-history here which he does not take up, equally important to understanding the historical interactions of philosophy and religion in the Abrahamic tradition, namely the Neoplatonic

(25). Though Neoplatonism clearly influenced Spinoza, the differences are fundamental. For example, as Fraenkel points out, as exhaustive substance, God is *causa sui* for Spinoza (264), a formula which can be traced back to Plotinus, but which Proclus says the father of Neoplatonism uses only metaphorically, since the very structure of reality implies that every cause is greater than its effect. Because he rejects the hierarchically ordered Neoplatonic cosmos, Spinoza is engaged in the philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity only in the broadest sense, since he sees no reason for mediation between God and his creatures: Mind exhausts all that is. It is for this reason, although Fraenkel does not include them amongst the Dutch philosopher's contemporary critics, that the Cambridge Platonists associated Spinoza's philosophy with atheism. If Fraenkel had begun with, say, the *Symposium*—where philosophy is not defined by what it has but by what it lacks—or the *Parmenides*—which makes the One non-being fundamental—rather than the *Republic*, or indeed stressed certain bits of that dialogue where Plato declares that the Good is superior to knowledge and being in rank and power (509 B), his story might have reached a different outcome.

Counterfactuals aside, this study is to be commended for both the breadth and depth of its learning, and should inspire a rich scholarly dialogue going forward. It is especially important that Fraenkel demonstrates the continuity of Greek philosophy in the medieval period, that this continuity is common to Jews, Christians and Muslims, and that, moreover, such questions remained and remain relevant for Enlightenment and contemporary philosophy and politics.